United Nations ST/AI/2003/7

Secretariat

30 October 2003

Administrative instruction

Competitive examination for recruitment to the Professional category of staff members from other categories

The Under-Secretary-General for Management, pursuant to section 4.2 of Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/1997/1, and for the purpose of defining the conditions under which staff members in the General Service and related categories may take competitive examinations for recruitment to the Professional category, promulgates the following:

Section 1
General provisions

Competitive examinations are held annually in particular occupational groups for recruitment to the Professional category, in accordance with the needs of the Organization. Specific arrangements for such examinations shall be announced through information circulars, which shall be issued at least three months in advance of the upcoming examinations. Competitive examinations leading to recruitment to the Professional category shall be open to staff members under the conditions set out below.

Section 2
Selection of posts

2.1 The Office of Human Resources Management, taking into account information provided by departments and offices at all duty stations, will establish projections of junior Professional level (P-1/P-2) posts subject to geographical distribution that will be or are expected to become available in the 12 months preceding placement. On the basis of these projections, the Central Examinations Board will make an initial identification of the occupational groups for which each examination is to be held. The selected occupational groups will normally be the same as for national competitive examinations.

2.2 The total number of posts to be selected for this purpose will be up to 10 per cent of the number of staff, other than language staff, that were recruited during the previous calendar year at the junior Professional level (P-1/P-2) after passing a competitive examination.

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Section 3
Eligibility

3.1 A staff member serving in the General Service and related categories, including the Field Service category up to and including the FS-5 level, may apply to take a competitive examination in a particular occupational group, provided that he or she:

(a) Has a minimum of five years' continuous service in the Secretariat, excluding any service in separately administered funds or programmes, except as otherwise provided in section 3.2 below;

(b) Has a rating of at least "fully meets performance expectations" or "fully successful performance" in his or her last performance appraisal;

(c) Holds a United Nations letter of appointment valid until at least six months after the date of administration of the written examination;

(d) Meets the minimum eligibility criteria set out in section 4 of the present instruction.

3.2 Short breaks in service of not more than six months may be allowed, at the discretion of the Central Examinations Board. Staff members who had previously served continuously for at least five years with the Secretariat, had resigned and, by 31 December of the calendar year of the examination, would have served continuously for at least three years since their reappointment will also be considered eligible, provided that they meet the other requirements.

3.3 National Professional Officers who are recruited locally to perform functions at the Professional level are not considered eligible to take this examination since they are not in the General Service or related categories.

Section 4
Eligibility criteria

4.1 Staff members are invited to apply for one of the occupational groups in which the examination is to be held in a given year. The minimum eligibility criterion is a three-year first-level university degree, broadly related to the occupational group for which the candidate has applied in a given year. Staff members who have a degree or degrees broadly related to two occupational groups offered in a given year may apply to take the examination in each of these two occupational groups. Examples of acceptable university degrees for specific occupational groups shall be provided in the information circular announcing upcoming examination.

4.2 Staff members who had served in the Secretariat for at least five years by 31 December 1989 will be allowed to take the examination in any one of the occupational groups in which the examination is held in a given year, upon providing evidence of post-secondary academic qualifications. Should such staff members hold a first-level university degree or degrees broadly related to the occupational groups offered in a given year, they may apply to take the examination in a second occupational group to which their degree is broadly related.

4.3 In addition to the minimum eligibility criteria stipulated above, those staff members who have sat for previous competitive examinations must have achieved a mark of at least 30 per cent in the overall written portion of the previous

examination in the occupational group(s) for which they are now applying. In cases where the staff member did not obtain 30 per cent, the staff member should submit to the Central Examinations Board tangible proof, in detail, of his or her preparation for the new examination (e.g., official transcripts demonstrating relevant university-level courses successfully completed, detailed summary of relevant materials used for study, detailed description of the nature and duration of relevant field work). Failure to submit such evidence will result in the staff member's ineligibility to sit for the new examination.

4.4 The Central Examinations Board will determine the eligibility of all applicants in consultation with the Office of Human Resources Management. Staff members shall provide relevant documents, as required, as evidence in support of their meeting the minimum eligibility criteria described in this section and the eligibility requirements listed in section 3.1.

4.5 Staff members who have been found ineligible by the Central Examinations Board to sit for the examination will be informed of the reason for that decision. Staff members who have cause to believe that they have been unfairly excluded from participating in the examination may appeal to the Board for review. Such appeals must be received by the Board at Headquarters within 10 working days of the receipt of notification of rejection. In order to meet the deadline, candidates serving at offices away from Headquarters must submit their appeal to the chairperson of the Board by telegram, fax or e-mail.

Section 5
Applications

Staff members who wish to submit an application shall complete the appropriate application form annexed to the information circular announcing the upcoming examinations and submit it with all required documentation to the Central Examinations Board by the deadline indicated in the information circular.

Section 6
Format and substance of the examination

6.1 The examination will take into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of the United Nations and will consist of a written examination, for which candidates will remain anonymous, and an oral examination:

(a) *Written examination (80 per cent of the marks).* The written examination consists of (a) a specialized paper that tests the substantive knowledge of the particular occupation for which the candidate is being tested and (b) a general paper, which tests drafting skills.

(b) *Oral examination (20 per cent of the marks).* The oral examination will consist of an interview with the candidate, who will be asked questions designed to test his or her general knowledge of international affairs and the United Nations core values and competencies necessary for positions in the relevant occupational group(s).

6.2 All written and oral examinations will normally follow a similar format in all occupational groups and will be consistent with the national competitive examination format.

6.3 The written examination for all occupational groups will be administered simultaneously at all duty stations. Candidates who have been accepted for two occupational groups will be required to complete the examination papers the same day. Eligible candidates will be informed in writing of the exact date, time and location of the written examination. Staff members who have to sit for the examinations outside established working hours will be granted compensatory time off.

6.4 On the basis of performance in the written examination, the Board of Examiners will invite selected candidates to an oral examination. The number of candidates convoked for the oral examination will normally be three times the number of posts available in that occupational group. More or fewer candidates may be convoked if the Central Examinations Board considers it to be warranted.

6.5 Prior to the oral examination, candidates convoked for that part of the examination will receive a list from the Office of Human Resources Management, approved by the Central Examinations Board, of all the posts available in the relevant occupational group and will be requested to indicate in order of preference those posts for which they wish to be considered. In addition to the list of posts, candidates will also receive a description of the functions for those posts. An expression of preference by a candidate for a particular post at a given duty station indicates the staff member's readiness to serve in that post at the duty station where it is located, if successful in the examination. The oral examination will not be held before the list of posts is available for distribution to the candidates concerned.

6.6 Additional information on the format of the examination will be included in the separate information circular announcing the upcoming examinations. Sample questions, as well as lists of topics that may be helpful in preparing for the examination, will be made available at all duty stations through the United Nations Intranet.

Section 7
Language of the examination

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 37/235 D of 21 December 1982, candidates participating in the examination shall be permitted to take the examination in any of the working languages of the regional commissions, with due regard to the requisite proficiency in one of the working languages of the Secretariat. In order to demonstrate such proficiency, all candidates will have to take the general paper of the written examination in either English or French. The oral examination must also be taken in either English or French.

Section 8
Central Examinations Board

8.1 The Central Examinations Board is composed of five members appointed by the Secretary-General: a chairperson selected from among staff serving at Headquarters, with the concurrence of the representatives of the staff; two members nominated by the representatives of the staff, one of whom will be from a duty station away from Headquarters; and two members nominated by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management, one of whom will be from a third duty station. The Board will have a non-voting ex officio member representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management and a secretary.

8.2 The Central Examinations Board has the following responsibilities:

(a) To oversee the examination procedures and arrangements;

(b) To screen all applications and determine the eligibility of candidates to sit for the examination;

(c) To review candidates' appeals and complaints regarding the examination process;

(d) To select and approve, on the basis of a list of projections provided by the Office of Human Resources Management, the posts to be filled through the examinations;

(e) To review and decide upon recommendations made by the boards of examiners, especially on the arrangements for the marking of papers; recommendations on which candidates are to be convoked to the oral examination, based on results of the written examination; recommendations on the attainment of the minimum professional standards required for recruitment; and recommendations for the recruitment of successful candidates;

(f) To establish the final ranking of candidates and then, taking into account the expressions of preference by the candidates, assign the posts to the successful candidates;

(g) To recommend to the Secretary-General possible improvements for future examinations;

(h) To recommend, pursuant to section 2 above, which occupational groups will be selected for the next examination.

8.3 Staff members who have complaints with respect to the procedures and arrangements for the examination should contact the Secretary of the Central Examinations Board in writing within 10 working days of the event that gave rise to the complaint. The established practice of the Board is to review such complaints within a reasonable period after receipt.

Section 9
Boards of examiners

9.1 Boards of examiners will be appointed by the Secretary-General, and each board will consist of a chairperson elected by the members of the board, normally at least two members nominated by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management and an equal number of members nominated by the representatives of the staff. Each board will have a non-voting ex officio member representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management.

9.2 Boards of examiners will normally be composed of staff members of the Secretariat; however, staff members of the specialized agencies or outside experts may also be included if so agreed between representatives of the Secretary-General and representatives of the staff.

9.3 Under the overall responsibility of the Central Examinations Board, boards of examiners have the following responsibilities:

(a) To mark the written examination. A board of examiners will be established to mark the specialized paper of the written examination, and another

board of examiners will be established to mark the general paper of the written examination;

(b) To report to the Central Examinations Board the results of the written examination;

(c) To recommend to the Central Examinations Board the minimum standard required;

(d) To recommend to the Central Examinations Board a list of candidates (who are not identified by name), in ranking order, to be convoked to the oral examination for each occupational group, based on the results of the written examination;

(e) To conduct and mark the oral examination;

(f) To recommend to the Central Examinations Board the final ranking of candidates (who are not identified by name) in order of merit by occupational group, based on the total of the combined results of the written and oral examinations.

Section 10
Examinations and Tests Section

10.1 The Office of Human Resources Management, through its Examinations and Tests Section, shall be responsible for the administration of the examination.

10.2 The Examinations and Tests Section has the following responsibilities:

(a) To ensure the preparation and validity of examination materials;

(b) To ensure the confidentiality of all materials and to provide for security at all stages of the examination process;

(c) To coordinate with designated Secretariat staff and consultants for the preparation of materials at different stages of the examination, while ensuring maximum security;

(d) To facilitate the issuance of necessary information circulars and sample examination papers;

(e) To organize simultaneous worldwide administration of examinations;

(f) To convoke all candidates to the written examination and oral examination, after consultation with the Central Examinations Board;

(g) To implement objective examination procedures at all stages of the examination, working in close cooperation with the Central Examinations Board and the boards of examiners;

(h) To provide ex officio members for the Central Examinations Board and for each board of examiners as representatives of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management;

(i) To organize the production and printing of all materials under maximum security conditions;

(j) To ensure the dispatch and storage of examination materials under maximum security conditions at all examination locations;

(k) To provide any other support and assistance at all stages of the examinations.

Section 11
Informing candidates of results

11.1 The Examinations and Tests Section will, upon completion of the marking of the examination, communicate in writing to all candidates their ranking in the written examination, as well as whether they have achieved a mark of 30 per cent or higher in the overall written part of the examination. Those candidates who have taken the oral examination will also be given their ranking in that part of the examination.

11.2 The candidates for each occupational group will be ranked on the basis of their combined scores in the written and oral examinations. Taking into account the level of difficulty of the examination, the boards of examiners will make recommendations as to the level above which the candidates will be considered to be qualified to perform at the junior Professional level. The final ranking of the candidates by occupational groups will be established by the Central Examinations Board on the basis of these recommendations. The recommendations concerning the qualification of candidates to perform at the junior Professional level and the final ranking will be made confidentially, with full respect for anonymity.

Section 12
Recruitment of successful candidates

12.1 The Central Examinations Board will make the final recommendations to the Secretary-General with regard to the recruitment and assignment of successful candidates. When approved by the Secretary-General, the recommendations of the Central Examinations Board will be implemented.

12.2 After the Secretary-General's approval of the recommendations of the Central Examinations Board, no additional posts will be considered for recruitment of successful candidates from that year's examination.

12.3 Successful candidates will be recruited against the posts selected for the examination. The Office of Human Resources Management, in cooperation with the Central Examinations Board, will be responsible for the assignment of successful candidates to posts in the occupational groups in which they have succeeded, after taking into account, in order of priority, the ranking of the candidates in the examinations and the stated preferences of the candidates. In the event that, within an occupational group, there is an unused post or posts because there was an insufficient number of successful candidates meeting the requirements to perform at the junior Professional level, the unused quota will be allocated to the occupational group that has the largest number of unplaced successful candidates, up to the limit of available posts in that occupational group. Should there be two or more occupational groups with the same number of unplaced successful candidates, the unused quota would then be allocated to that occupational group with the smallest number of candidates who have been placed.

12.4 Successful candidates will normally be expected to serve at least two years in their new post. Candidates who do not wish to be assigned to the post or posts available to them relinquish ipso facto their claim to recruitment under the

competitive examination, and, consequently, the next-ranked unplaced successful candidate who has been certified as having met the minimum professional standard for recruitment will be offered the post after confirmation by the Central Examinations Board. If a candidate who is recruited separates from the Organization within six months of the implementation of the recruitment, the next-ranked unplaced successful candidate who has been certified as having met the minimum professional standard for recruitment will be offered the post after confirmation by the Board.

12.5 All successful candidates will be recommended for recruitment at the junior Professional level. The salary step at these levels will be determined on the basis of applicable staff rules.

12.6 The names of the successful candidates recruited will appear in the information circular on appointments, promotions and other staff changes, which is issued on a regular basis. The effective date of recruitment of the successful candidates will be the first day of the month in which they assume the functions of the post for which they have been selected.

Section 13
Final provisions

13.1 The present instruction shall enter into force on 1 November 2003.

13.2 Administrative instruction ST/AI/2001/8, entitled "Competitive examination for recruitment to the Professional category of staff members from other categories", is hereby abolished.

(*Signed*) Catherine **Bertini**
Under-Secretary-General for Management